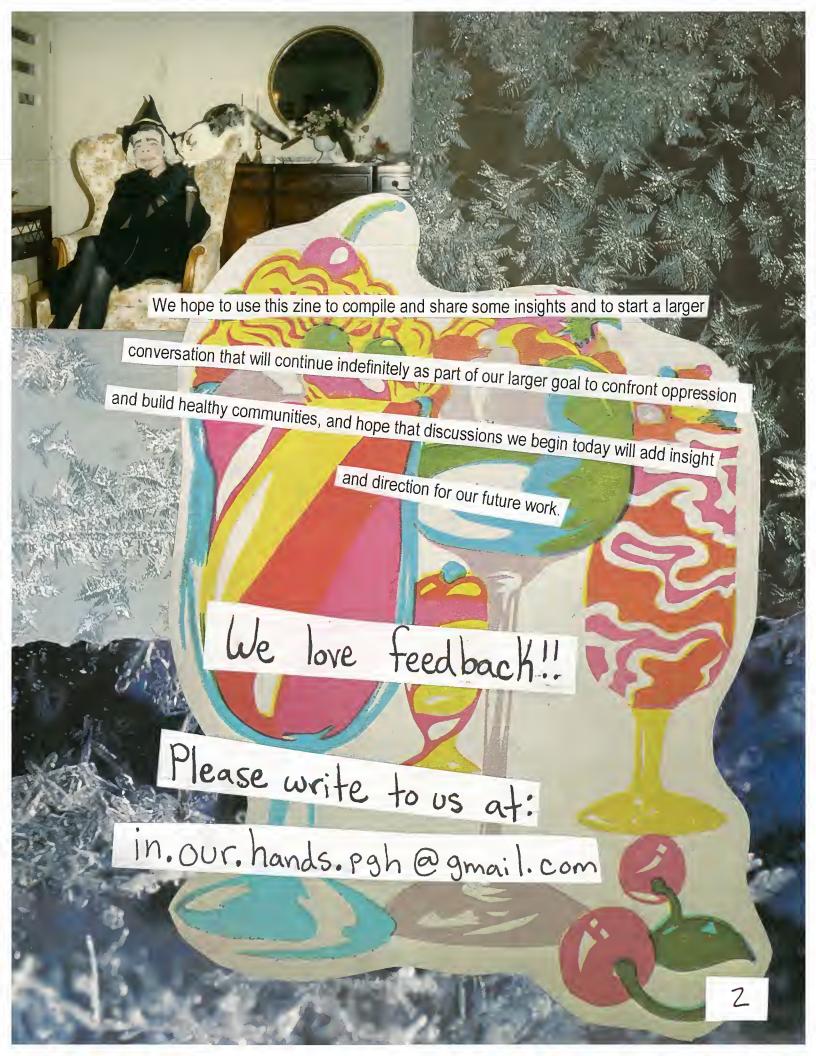


Using a Community Accountability Approach

to Address Sexual Violence, Abuse, 3 Oppression.

Zine Issue #1





## Why an alternative to the criminal justice system and mais

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For many of us, our instinct after or during a crisis is to seek help from institutions in authority, in particular from law enforcement. While survivors may choose this path in good authority, there are a number of reasons why survivors may choose to avoid it.

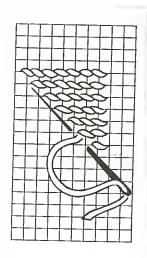
First, law enforcement and the criminal justice system seek to preserve an oppressive status quo, which is dangerous for marginalized groups, such as people of color, women, or LGBT people, even when they are the ones who have requested protection.

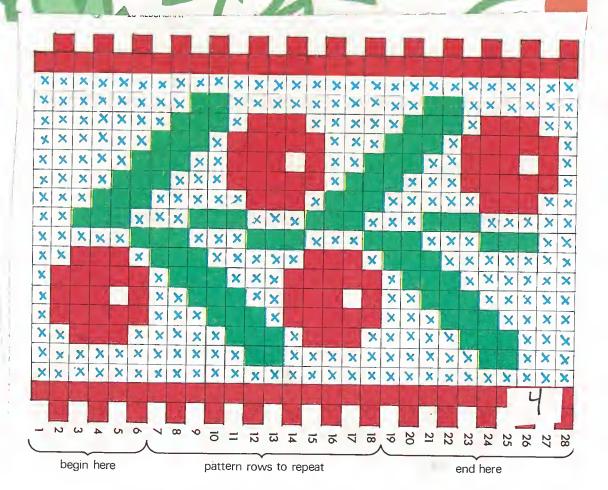


Secondly, the criminal justice system leaves the burden of proof on the survivor, and questions their credibility. This is in direct conflict with our principle of never doubting the survivor. According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), only about 20% of rapes reported to police lead to an arrest; less than 10% lead to a conviction. We believe this is a direct consequence of the criminal justice system's attitude of skepticism toward survivors.

Perhaps most importantly, even the stated goals of traditional institutions, from the criminal justice system to anti-violence agencies such as shelters, may be significantly different from our goals. At most, the institutional approach may result in a punishment for the perpetrator or a temporary safe space for the survivor. But it doesn't address long-term recovery and healing for the survivor or rehabilitation for the perpetrator, or the responsibility of communities to prevent future abuse and sexual assault. Punitive approaches are isolating, focusing on the survivor and perpetrator as individuals, rather than members of a living community.

Survivors are entitled to seek help from established resources, including the criminal justice system. Survivors are entitled to seek punishment for their perpetrators. Additionally, these approaches can help survivors stay safe, at least in the short-term, and that should be the first priority. However, our approach to community accountability and the traditional institutional approach are fundamentally in conflict, and if a survivor chooses to utilize both, they may have to navigate these points of conflict.





## Common Goals of our Group:

Promote self-determination and community confidence to deal with high-conflict situations and work to stop physical, emotional, mental, and structural violence, as well as all other forms of violence, aggression, discrimination, misogyny, and oppression.

Promote collective action against sexual assault and abuse that moves beyond complete reliance on a criminal justice system which often leaves minority groups and survivors powerless and re-victimized.

Prioritize the needs and safety of survivors

Use readings and discussions as a basis for skill-building and creating a network to provide resources, protection, a voice, support, peer to peer mediation, and facilitation of community accountability processes for survivors, as desired by the survivor or community affected.

Maintain an open door policy that includes a dialogue and commitment that do not stop when the reading discussion is over.

Evolve continuously in the reach, scope, and inclusivity of our actions based on the above principles (by means of ideas and opinions, resources, situations, etc., as they arise).

Build a deliberate and intentional group committed to inclusivity regardless of race, sex, gender, religious affiliations, class, age, ability, employment, hobbies, social/cultural niche, etc., and to include those who are affected by these issues and agree with these goals and principles.

## LANGUAGES

As our group has evolved, we have had many discussion on how we use terminology and language. When we say something, what do we really mean? What is included and what is not? To ensure we all have the tools needed for this discussion, we wanted to explain how we use certain terms to talk about accountability and sexual violence.

<u>First, a note about gender</u>: while we do not wish to hide the fact that a majority of survivors are women or people who don't fit into the gender binary, and the majority of perpetrators are men, we strive to use gender neutral language throughout. We do not wish to obscure the fact that violence has historically, and still is consistently used to justify and uphold colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. However, we also acknowledge that anyone can be a survivor, perpetrator, or both. Thus, when we use the pronoun "they", we are not necessarily talking about a group of people, but are attempting to obscure gender in order to avoid oversimplifying anyone's personal experience.

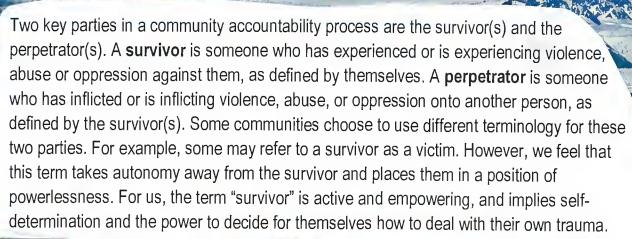
That said, let's begin with **Rape Culture**, which is the normalization of sexual violence and rape due to societal attitudes about sexuality and gender. Rape culture seeks to excuse, condone, normalize, and encourage interpersonal, sexual, and intimate violence. Rape culture can be as subtle and pervasive as billboards that objectify women, or as direct as street harassment. Rape culture encourages non-consensual feelings of entitlement to, or devaluation of, someone else's body and/or a disrespect for one's autonomy. It is an abuse

of power dynamics and the result of patriarchy and white male supremacy.

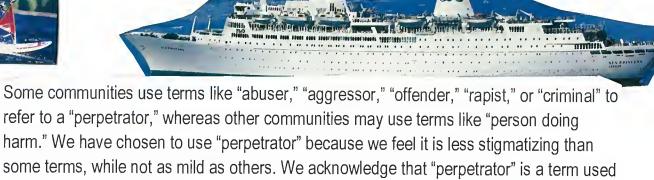
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When we say **Accountability** or "being held accountable", we mean taking responsibility for one's abusive, violent, harassing or oppressive actions. We mean acknowledging these actions, and making major strides to change. We mean dropping one's guard and defensiveness, and showing humility and a desire to stop and prevent these actions from reoccurring. We mean more than just a verbal or written apology, we mean TAKING ACTION to change, to create safer and more inclusive communities for everyone, to end rape culture, patriarchy, all forms of misogyny, racism and white supremacy, sexism, and oppression in any form.

When we talk about Community, we are referring to networks of individuals who shu when we talk about Community, we are referring to networks of individuals who shu when we talk about Community, whether it be time, space, resources, interests, or a certain need when you are talk about Community, whether it be time, space, resources, interests, or a certain need when you are talk about Community, whether it be time, space, resources, interests, or a certain need to networks of individuals who should be time. 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It can be your family, or the group of friends you intersect, and anyone can be part of multiple communities can intersect, and anyone can be part of multiple regularly hang out with. Communities can intersect, and anyone can be part of multiple communities simultaneously. Cowfish communities simultaneously. So, when we say Community Accountability, we are talking about a process where perpetrators and community members attempt to recognize, end, and take responsibility for abuse, violence, harassment, or oppression that occur within their community. We mean a process of self-reflection, self-improvement, and goal-setting for making long-term, concrete behavioral changes. Community accountability processes are always dictated by and centered around the needs of the survivor(s), and can include one or many perpetrators, as well as other community members acting as support for the survivor(s) and perpetrator(s)by helping survivors to set goals and boundaries, offering healing support for the survivor(s), ensuring that the perpetrator(s) remain accountable by actively working towards the goals, respecting boundaries, and receiving support to process and heal from their abusive, violent, or oppressive behaviors. Community accountability also means that the entire community is accountable for ignoring, minimizing, or encouraging violence. Community members have a responsibility to hold each other accountable for harm, and to educate each other and themselves on how to effectively intervene, stop, and prevent abuse, violence, and oppression. The community also has a responsibility to prioritize the safety, needs, and wishes of the survivor(s) over any formal process, to include a healing process for the survivor(s), and to encourage honest and trusting relationships amongst one another.







within the criminal justice system, and as our group wishes to move away from language within that system, we hope to continue conversation and find a more appropriate term (let





\*\*\*Ideally, a community accountability process would also include **Allies/Supporters**. These are productive participants who form support systems either for the survivor, perpetrator, or both, but always work on behalf of the survivor. Supporters check in with and help create common goals for the accountability process, and ensure that the safety, needs, and wishes of the survivor remain central to the process.

silences or discredits the survivor, or is counter-productive to an accountability process. An do work to unlearn this impulse. It is our principal to always believe the survivor and never rape culture influence us to believe people with social power over those without. We must apprehensive or reluctant to engage in the process, or may outright deny any wrong-doing. often used to discredit, slander, or silence a survivor. The idea of "survivor credibility" lays When enacting a community accountability process, one may find the perpetrator(s) to be apologist is someone who supports, enables, and reproduces rape culture. Credibility is the burden of proof on the survivor to not only prove that harm has occurred to them, but shaming are often used to challenge a survivor's credibilit. Social structures that uphold frustrating and traumatizing when apologists question the credibility of the survivor. An This can be very frustrating and traumatizing for a survivor and their allies. It is just as also to prove that they are a trustworthy source. Accusations of mental illness or slut-Apologist is anyone who denies, enables, or excuses the actions of the perpetrator, involves third party neutral person(s) to act as mediator(s) between the two or more parties violence, and necessitates equal power from all sides to negotiate. Oppression can never We would like to take a moment now to discuss the difference between an accountability process and mediation. A Mediation process is used for situations of MUTUAL abuse or be mediated, as it inherently involves an unequal balance of power. A mediation process judge their credibility. involved to reach a common goal.

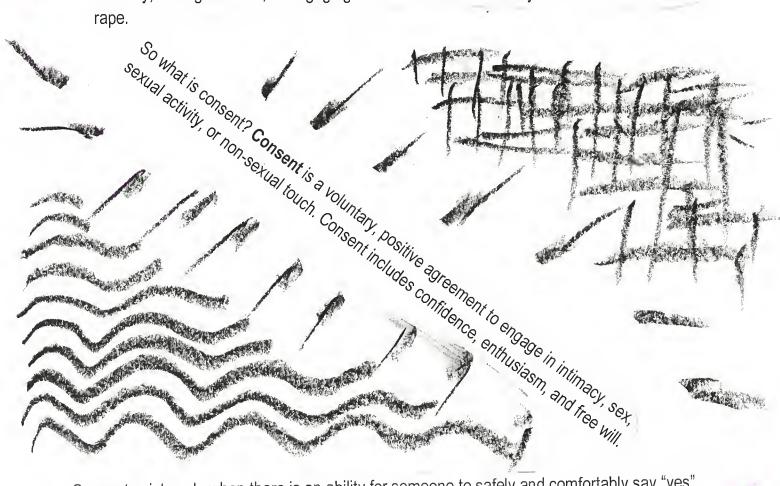


So what do we mean when we say violence, abuse or oppression? Sexual Violence is any attempt to take sexual agency away from another person. It can include (but is not limited to) rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment; or emotional, mental or physical abuse. We define Sexual Harassment as any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and any other verbal or nonverbal gesturing, or physical harassment of a sexual nature. This can include giving "attitude" to or guilting someone who has not consented to sexual advances. Abuse can be sexual, emotional, physical, economical, or spiritual in nature. Abuse involves taking advantage of an imbalance of power, or a power struggle. Abuse plays on one's vulnerabilities, and is generally dynamic and ongoing: meaning abuse generally never occurs once, but over a course of time, and can have many faces. Abuse can be subtle or undeniably obvious. Sometimes it may be unclear to an outsider who is the survivor and who is the perpetrator of abuse. Oppression relies on an imbalance of power: it is the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice against a group or groups of people to maintain a status quo that privileges some over others. Oppression can, but need not, be extreme or violent, and can be found in legal, economic, social, or cultural realms. Oppression can be silent and embedded in everyday norms, habits, or symbols. Oppression limits people's freedom, and reduces their potential to be fully human. People who experience oppression experience very real suffering, pain, and trauma, which can also be passed along through generations. Some examples of oppressed groups are people of color, indigenous groups, women, trans\*and queer people, elders, or people with disabilities. When a person or group experiences more than one type of oppression, we say they live within Dangerous Intersections of oppression.





A word we choose not to use often, but feel needs to be defined is **Rape**. Many of us find this word to be too triggering, and instead refer to "sexual violence," when needed. However, as many perpetrators and apologists choose to convolute this word, we want to give it a straightforward meaning. We define rape as ANY non-consensual sex or sexual activity, and involves taking away someone's personal agency. Rape does not have to include physical force (s.a. against someone who is incapacitated). Touching someone sexually, having sex with, or engaging someone in sexual activity who has not consented is rape.



Consent exists only when there is an ability for someone to safely and comfortably say "yes" or "no," and does not exist when a power dynamic is being abused. Consent should always be verbal between people who don't know each other's boundaries and desires. Silence is never consent. Inability or refusal is not consent. Discomfort is not consent. Being married or in a romantic relationship is not consent. Coercion is never consent. Assuming it's "ok" is not consent An abuse of power is not consent. When is doubt, just ask for consent.

Intimacy involves a relationship that can be romantic, platonic, sexual, emotional, non-sexual physical, or verbal. Intimacy involves trust, vulnerability, and consent. However, intimate relationships are often the site of abuse and violence, where trust and vulnerability are taken for granted, and consent is assumed or dismissed altogether. Intimate relationships are inherently vulnerable, and require a responsibility among their participants to prioritize each other's safety and needs.

When dealing with accountability processes, we strive to help the survivor(s) find **Closure**. Closure can be anything that helps the survivor(s) find clarity and resolve from a traumatic experience. Closure is a feeling that the traumatic experience is over and can be dealt with, and is part (but not the end) of a healing process. A survivor may find closure with the accountability process itself, but may re-experience the trauma or be triggered to relive the trauma after the process is over. The unfortunate reality of a survivor is that they may never fully shed the trauma, but at least with a holistic healing process, they can learn how to work with it. This is why we feel including a long-term healing process for the survivor(s) is absolutely mandatory- although often overlooked- for any community accountability process.

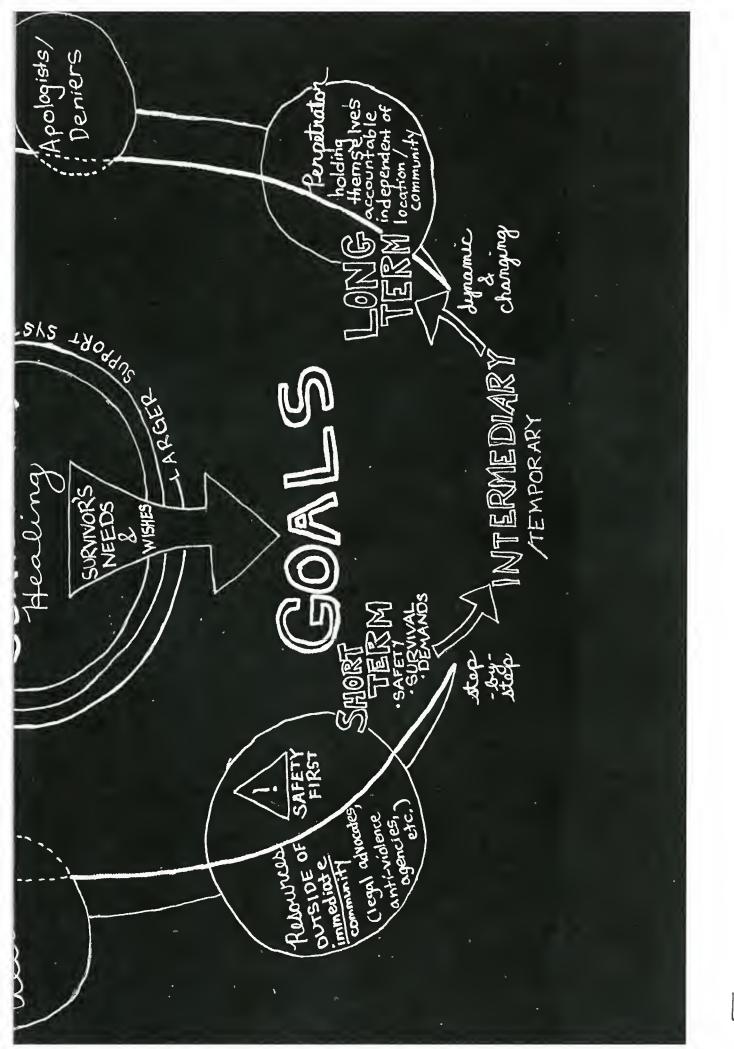


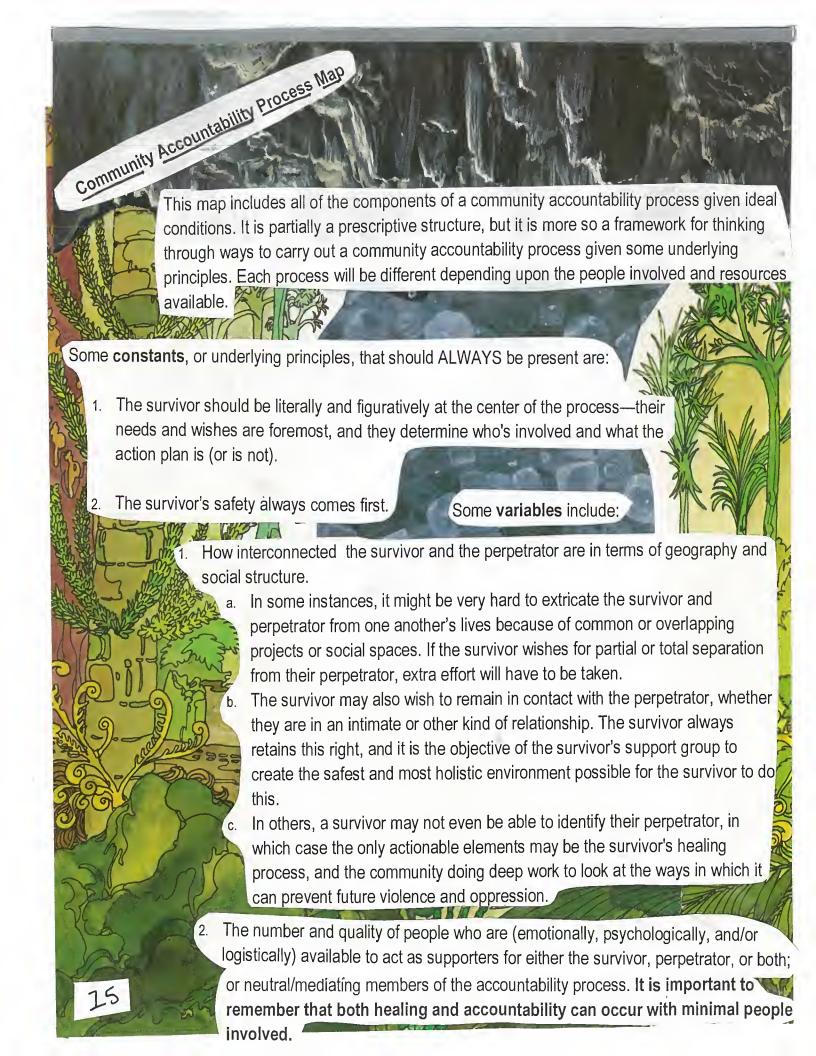


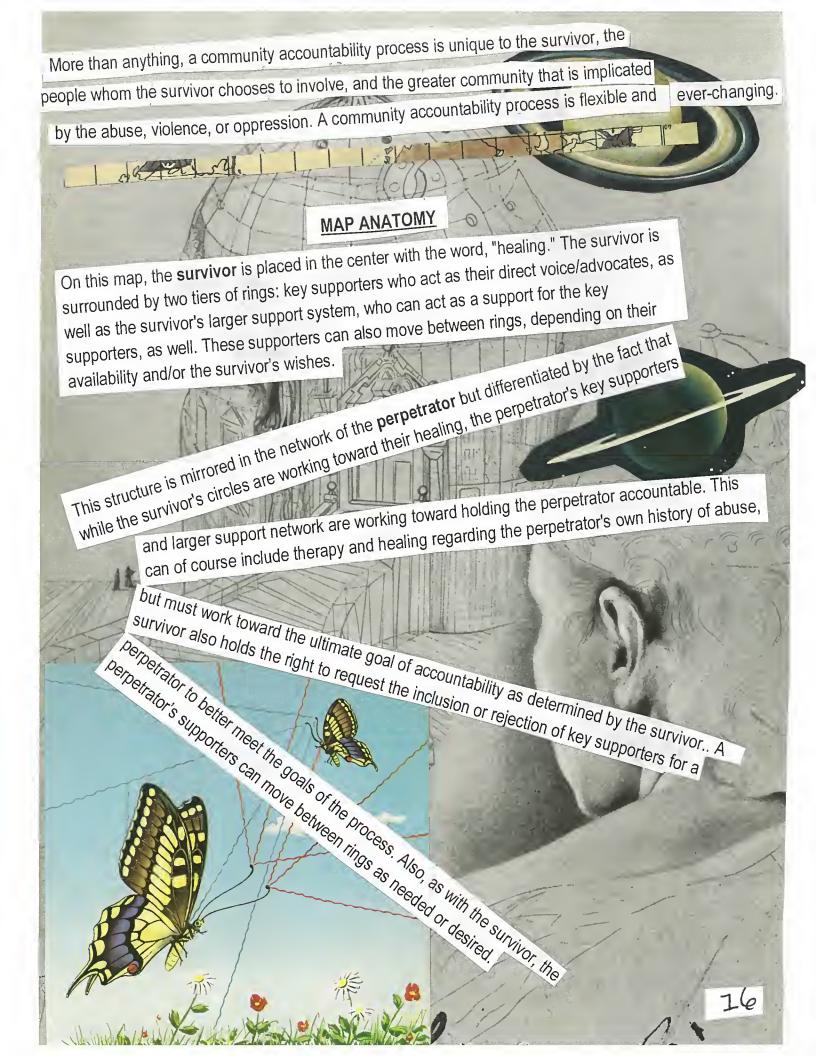


These terms are merely the tools for engaging in a complex and multidimensional accountability process. While some may feel that our toolkit is overburdened with semantics, others may find that it doesn't go far enough. And, while we as a group agree that investing too heavily in language can actually become disempowering to the survivor and the process as a whole, we also feel that having a solid basis from which to build is essential to any productive accountability process.

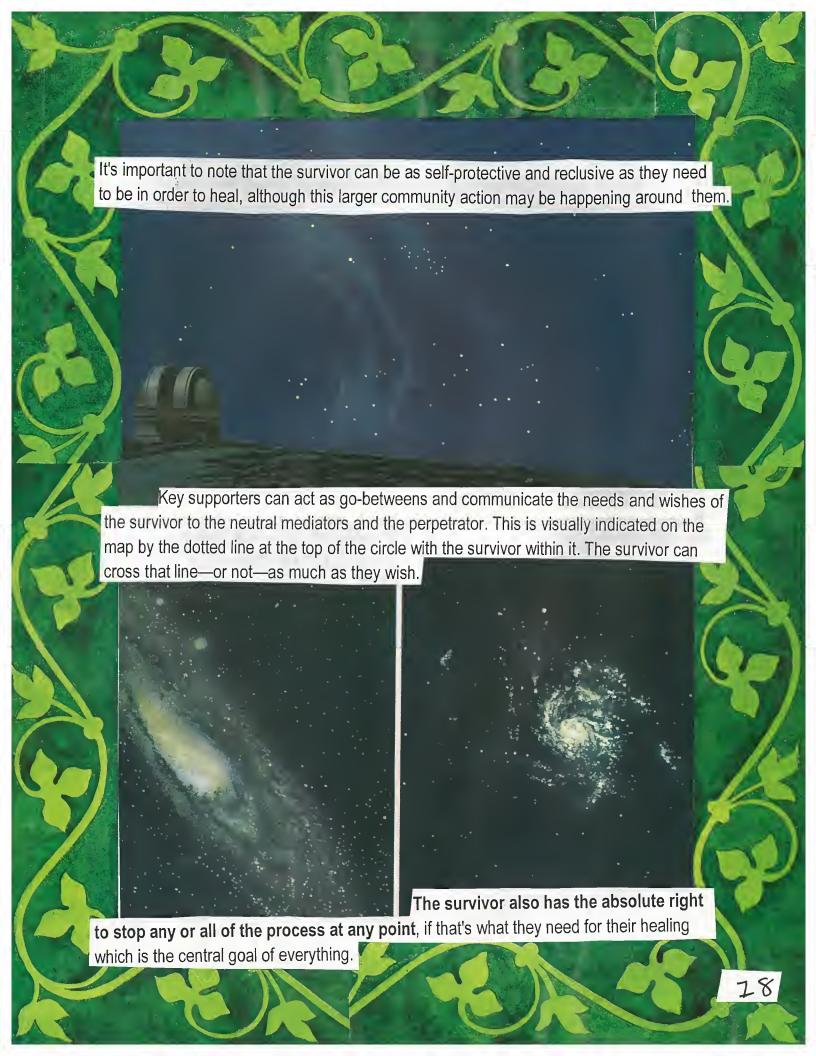
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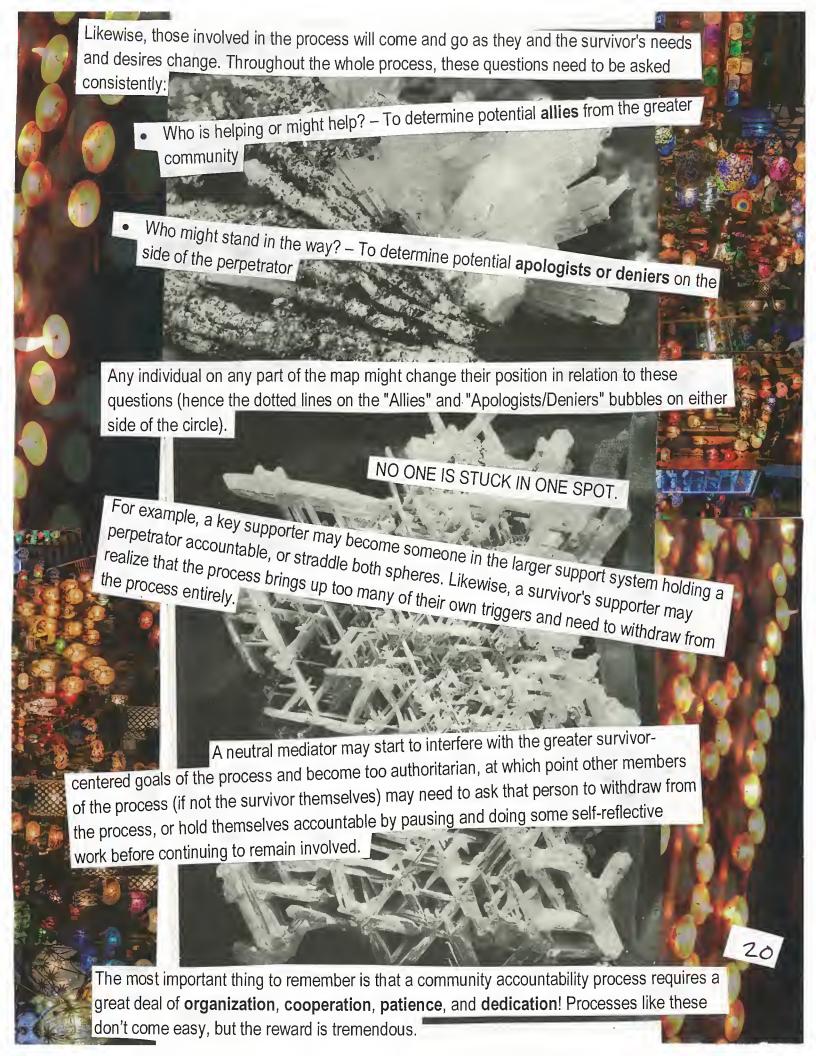


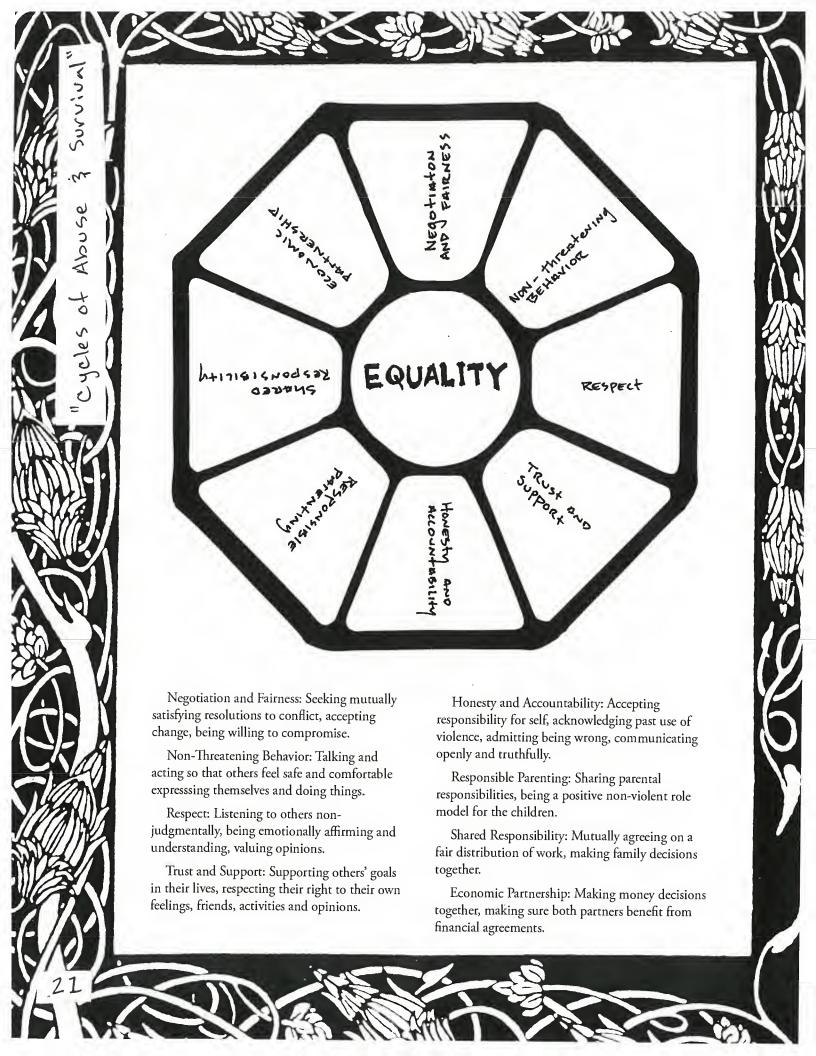


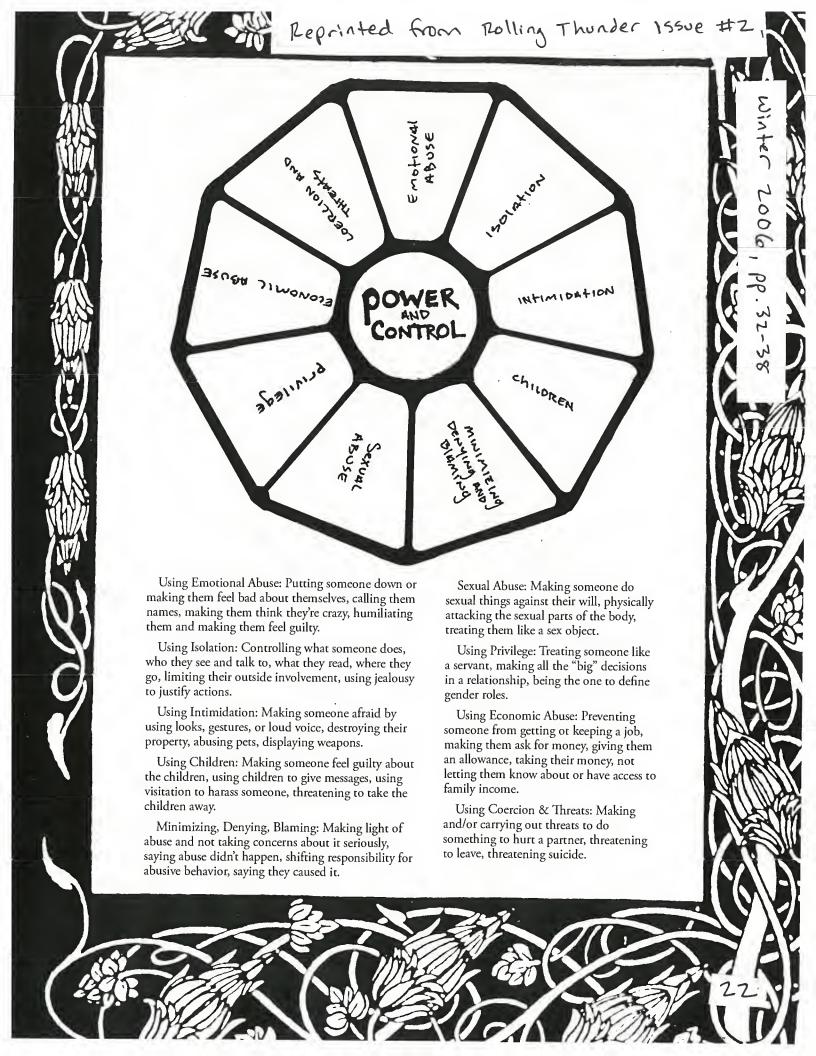
The outcome of the survivor's needs and wishes are the **goals** that are set for the community accountability process as a whole. These goals can influence the actions of those who are in the "inner circle" of the process, as well as the greater community that may not necessarily have as much at stake in the accountability process but still should be responsible and responsive to it. Goals include:

- Short Term: Here (and throughout the process), the most important thing to ensure is the SAFETY of the survivor(s). This can include getting outside resources involved (such as the criminal justice system, traditional anti-violence governmental agencies) IF AND ONLY IF the survivor deems it helpful and desired. This can also include speaking with non-traditional "authorities" in the community, such as the people who organize events, run cooperative venues, or work at establishments where the survivor and perpetrator may intersect, in order to create safe spaces. Sometimes, if a perpetrator is unwilling to take responsibility for the harm they have done, an accountability process will stay in this short-term scope. Short-term actions can also include demands and retaliatory actions, such as making daily life difficult for the perpetrator until they start to take the accountability process seriously.
- Intermediary/Temporary: These goals can include ongoing mediations, seeking counseling and support groups for both the survivor and the perpetrator, and compiling resources for the community to learn about and begin to deconstruct rape culture and systems of oppression. The safety of the survivor(s) and their needs and wishes are still at the center of this step, even as the actions become more broadbased, deeper, and long-term in scope.
- Long Term: The survivor's supporters will have possibly determined who can remain a support to them on a long-term level, so that the onus of support for healing is not on the survivor. The same is hopefully true on the perpetrator's side, but for holding themselves accountable independent of location or community. On the community level, long term goals could include transformation in the ways that people think about and deal with issues of violence and oppression, as well as determining and enacting preventative measures so that the same kinds of violence and oppression are less likely to occur again.

Throughout the entire goal-setting process, those involved should take things step-by-step so as not to become overwhelmed with overarching goals that may be unattainable at the time. The goals are also free to be dynamic and changing as the process organically unfolds.









## READINGS & RESOURCES

The Revolution Starts at Home: Taking Risks, Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies, Written by a collective of women of color from Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA): Alisa Bierria, Onion Carrillo, Eboni Colbert, Xandra Ibarra, Theryn Kigvamasud'Vashti, and Shale Maulana:

https://solidarity-

us.org/files/Implementing%20Grassroots%20Accountability%20Strategies.pdf

Betrayal: A critical Analysis of Rape Culture in Anarchist Subcultures, Published by Words to Fire Press:

https://libcom.org/library/betrayal-critical-analysis-rape-culture-anarchist-subcultures

Witch Hunt: Addressing Mental Health and Confronting Sexual Assault in Activist Communities, by Annie Anxiety, made available by Philly is Pissed:

http://www.phillyspissed.net/sites/default/files/ZINE%20Witch%20Hunt.pdf http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.com/2012/04/thinking-through-perpetrator.html

Thinking Through Perpetrator Accountability, Published in Rolling Thunder #8, a quarterly journal by Crimethinc.:

http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.com/2012/04/thinking-through-perpetrator.html

Incite! National network of radical feminists of color. Community Accountability resources page:

http://www.incite-national.org/page/community-accountability

Creative Interventions Toolkit, A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence, Prerelease version. The CI Interventions Team including partners from Asian Women's Shelter, La Clinica de la Raza, Narika & Shimtuh is working hard to transform our onthe-ground work into useful tools for community-based violence intervention:

http://www.creative-interventions.org/tools/toolkit/

